DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 366 UD 034 890

AUTHOR Munoz, Marco A.; Clavijo, Catherine
TITLE Working with Limited English Proficient Students: Input from the Field on a High School Newcomer Program.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education Programs; Dropout Prevention; Dropout Programs; *English (Second Language); High Schools; Immigrants; Language Proficiency; *Limited English Speaking; Program Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS Newcomer Schools

ABSTRACT

While the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students has grown nationwide, these students' academic achievement levels have lagged significantly behind those of their language majority peers. Dropout rates among LEP students are also high. The Newcomer Program within Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools is a full-day transitional English as a Second Language (ESL) program for newly arrived immigrant and refugee high school students. ESL teachers and bilingual associate instructors and teaching assistants share with the regular classroom teacher the responsibility of educating LEP students. This program offers students instruction in English as well as content classes with support in their native languages. It provides students with not just intensive language instruction, but also a safe educational environment in which to acquire basic academic and school survival skills. The Newcomer Program is characterized by an orientation to school, community, and society; an emphasis on English language development; and bilingual staff specifically trained to meet the needs of newcomer students. Evaluation of the program included classroom observations, focus group interviews with students, informal interviews with faculty and administrators, and student language testing. Results found that the Newcomer Program is meeting its goals of preparing students for mainstream classrooms. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Running head: Limited English Proficiency

ED 463 366

Working with Limited English Proficient Students: Input from the Field on a High School Newcomer Program

Marco A. Munoz

Catherine Clavijo

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS)

VanHoose Education Center

Accountability, Research, and Planning Department

3332 Newburg Road

Louisville, KY 40218

UD034890

M. Muñoz

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

While the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students has grown exponentially across the U.S., their level of academic achievement has lagged significantly behind that of their language majority peers and these students have high drop-out rates. The Newcomer Program is a full-day transitional English as a Second Language (ESL) program for newly arrived immigrant and refugee high school students. This program offers students with English instruction as well as content classes with support in the student's native language. The Newcomer program provides students not just with intensive language instruction, but also with a safe educational environment in which to acquire basic academic and school survival skills. The Newcomer program illustrates the following characteristics: (a) orientation to school, community, and society; (b) English language development; and, (c) bilingual staff specifically trained to meet the needs of newcomer students. Overall the Newcomer program is addressing its goals towards preparing students for the mainstream classroom.

Keywords: Limited English Proficiency, High School, Academic Achievement, At-Risk Students, Dropout Prevention

Working with Limited English Proficient Students: Input from the Field on a High School Newcomer Program

Each year, the United States becomes more ethnically and linguistically diverse, with over 90% of recent immigrants coming from non-English speaking countries. From the 1985-86 school year through 1994-95, the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students in public schools grew 109% while total enrollment increased by only 9.5% (Olsen, 1997). Thus, the proportion of language minority students in the schools is growing even more rapidly than the actual numbers. In 1994-95, over 3.1 million school-age children were identified as LEP, approximately 7.3% of the K-12 public school student population. While the number of LEP students has grown exponentially across the U.S., their level of academic achievement has lagged significantly behind that of their language majority peers and these students have high drop-out rates (Bennici & Strang, 1995).

Jefferson County Public Schools recognizes the need to serve children whose primary language is other than English. Through the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program, ESL teachers, along with bilingual associate instructors and teacher assistants, share with the regular classroom teacher the responsibility of educating Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

The primary goal of the ESL staff is to provide the necessary services to ensure that all LEP students become competent in the use of English. In the ESL classroom, students have the opportunity to acquire linguistic skills and cultural understanding necessary to participate in the mainstream activities of the school. The goals of the ESL Program are as follows: (a) to ensure educational access for immigrant and refugee students, (b) to ensure appropriate placement of immigrant and refugee students; (c) to improve school climate for immigrant and refugee

students, (d) to meet special needs of immigrant and refugee students, and (e) to empower immigrant and refugee parents.

Overview of Newcomer Program

Many school districts are facing increasing numbers of immigrant students who have low level of English or native language skills, and in many cases, have limited formal education in their native countries (Short, 1998). These students must learn English, take required content courses and catch up to their native-English speaking peers before high school graduation. Jefferson County Public School has developed the Newcomer Program located at Western High School to help serve these students. The Newcomer Program is a full-day transitional English as a Second Language (ESL) program for newly arrived immigrant and refugee students at Western High School. This program offers students with English instruction as well as content classes with support in the student's native language. Students can spend up to one year in the Newcomer program. The program is designed so that students spend the entire day, for up to two semesters, with up to 40 other immigrant and refugee students enrolled in the program. After one-year students make the transition into the regular classroom.

The Newcomer Program offers a range of instructional activities of students that reflect the goal of developing both language and academic skill, so that students may enter the mainstream classroom. Students receive an orientation to the United States and to the U.S. school system. Students also attend assemblies that address relevant topics such as college entrance exams and college enrollment procedures. Courses provided by the Newcomer program include Language Development, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Music, Computer Literacy, and Electives such as Art, Health, and Physical Education.

The program is designed to serve up to 40 students. This number may fluctuate through out the school year as new students arrive and others are places in the mainstream classroom. The program is open to all students in grades 9 to 11. Four full-time teachers provide instruction to Newcomer students. Four full time and two part time bilingual aids assist students in their native languages.

Evaluation Framework and Design

Stuffelbeam's (1971) CIPP model provided the framework for this evaluation. CIPP is an acronym for the four types of evaluation included in this model: Context evaluation, Input evaluation, Process evaluation, and Product evaluation. The main features of this evaluation include the results from the process evaluation assessing the Newcomer programs implementation and the product evaluation assessing the outcomes of the Newcomer program.

This evaluation utilized a mixed-method evaluation deign (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989). Both quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data were used in this evaluation design. The evaluation called for the use of classroom observations, focus group interviews with the students, informal interviews with school faculty and administrators and student pre-post language ability test. The rationale for the data collection is to document the impact of the Newcomer program on student academic achievement and attitudes towards school.

Evaluation Questions

In order to evaluate the Newcomer Program, the following questions will serve as the basis of the evaluation:

1. What are the characteristics of the student participants in the program?
2. Do the students participating in the program find it beneficial and of high quality?

3. Are the students in the program improving their English proficiency as measured by a standardized language assessment instrument?

Methodology

Evaluation Measures

Language Assessment Skills. The Language Assessment Skills (LAS) are composed of two batteries: (a) the reading and writing battery and (b) the oral battery. The LAS R/W (reading and writing), English version is a battery of reading and writing competency tests or students in grades 2-12 whose first language is not English. The Spanish version is for student's whose first language is Spanish. The LAS R/W includes multiple-choice assessment of writing ability. The LAS Oral measures vocabulary, comprehension, and production as will as aural discrimination and pronunciation. The LAS instrument measures English language skills necessary for functioning in the mainstream classroom.

Student Focus Group Interviews. Purposeful selection was used to identify several groups of students for three focus group interviews. Students were selected based on the following criteria (a) they are identified by their teachers as valuable informant about the program and (b) they volunteer to be interviewed. A semi-structered interview guide was developed (Appendix A). Students were asked to describe their perceptions of their experience in the Newcomer program.

Faculty and Administrators Interviews. Three informal interviews were conducted with faculty from Western High School, including one Newcomer teacher, one Newcomer program administrator and the school principal. Each individual was asked to describe their impression of the Newcomer program and to provide examples of how it has impacted its participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included tests of significance between the pre and posttests of student's language abilities (paired-samples t-test) and descriptive analysis of participants in the Newcomer Program. Data analysis of qualitative data in this evaluation was based on an interpretational model of analysis (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). As data was collected from interviews with students and faculty, interpretations and analysis evolved.

Evaluation Findings

Process Evaluation

Question 1. What are the characteristics of the students participating in the program?

The students from the Newcomer program at Western High School were included in this evaluation. These students have participated in the Newcomer Program for a minimum of nine months. Forty-six high school students participate in the Newcomer Program. These students represent a wide range of language backgrounds and English level abilities. The language background makeup of the participants includes 54.3% Spanish, 17.4 % Bosnian, 8.7% Somalian and 19.6% other languages or dialects. The majority of the students have placed in the ninth grade (37%), with six percent in the tenth grade and three percent in the tenth grade. Additional demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Profile of the Students in the Newcomer Program (N = 46)

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	32	69.6
Female	14	30.4
Language Background		
Spanish	25	54.3
Bosnian	8	17.4
Somalian	4	8.7
Other language/dialects	9	19.6
Grade		
9	37	80.4
10	6	13.0
11	3	6.5

Question 2. Do the students participating in the program find it beneficial and of high quality?

The researchers interviewed five groups of students across two days. Focus group interviews were conducted with two groups of five to eight Spanish speaking students, one group of five Somalian and two Bosnian students, one group with three Spanish-speaking students and one group with two Bosnian students. In total twenty-eight students were interviewed. The focus of the interview was to assess what the students were learning in the program, their confidence and ability to speak in English and preparation for mainstream classroom. Notes were taken during the interview. Each focus group interview lasted between 15 to 25 minutes. Some common themes emerged from the interviews.

The interviews revealed that overall one hundred percent of the students interviewed felt that the program was beneficial. More specifically, the program has provided them with an introduction to the American school system, a social network of friends and improved English abilities. The students clearly appreciated having interpreters available to help them in class and to attend one or two mainstream classes.

Interestingly, when asked if thy felt prepared to enter the mainstream classroom the responses from the Hispanic students were very different from the Bosnian, and Somalian students. The Spanish-speaking students stated that they were especially comfortable to be with other Spanish-speaking students. Most of them would prefer to stay in the program longer than one year. They all agreed that they would recommend the Newcomer program to a younger sibling or a friend. When asked, what do you think you have most benefited from this program, all students agreed that mathematics.

The Somalian students expressed a gratitude for the program, but were ready to continue into the mainstream classroom next year. They had made close friend in the mainstream classes

and felt their English has improved significantly. The only area that the students would like to see changed is that in one class the teacher speaks mostly Spanish and it is difficult for the non-Spanish speaking students to understand. Generally speaking, students said they liked their teachers and attending the mainstream classes with an interpreter. They perceive that they are building their abilities and confidence to speak English.

Limited English speakers are at risk of educational failure and dropping out of school. The following anecdote from the student's interviews reveals that the Newcomer program may be addressing this problem among ESL students. One student interviewed had been in the Newcomer program for less than a week. He had recently transferred from another high school where he was on the verge of dropping out. Because of the Newcomer program he has decided not to drop out and to pursue a high school degree.

Question 3. Are the students in the program improving their English proficiency as measured by a standardized language assessment instrument?

To assess whether participants in the Newcomer program improved their English proficiency, paired samples t-tests were conducted. Differences between the pre test and the posttest were significant at the .05 level in the Oral test ($t = -4.59$; $p < .01$), Reading ($t = -4.04$; $p < .01$) and Writing ($t = -9.34$; $p < .01$). An examination of Table 2 reveals that for all areas tested posttest mean scores were significantly greater than pretest means. These results indicate the Newcomer Program has had a positive effect on the participant's English achievement.

Table 2

Comparison Between Pretest and Posttest LAS Scores

Test	N	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD	t value
Oral	50	19.04	26.18	29.66	28.21	-4.59*
Reading	43	23.67	31.58	50.33	25.21	-4.04*
Writing	42	12.69	21.25	43.62	21.37	-9.34*

*$p < .001$

Note: This analysis is limited to the number of students who have taken the LAS during the 2000 and 2001 school year.

Table 3 displays the results of the baseline and treatment year data on the basis of proficiency levels. As it can be observed, the levels of proficiency changed after the intervention took place. On the baseline year, 66% of the students were in the lowest level (i.e., 1a). However, on the treatment year, 48% of the students were in the same low category (i.e., 1a). On the opposite end of the spectrum, there were three times more students in the highest category when comparing both years (6% in the treatment year versus 2% in the comparison year).

Table 3

Pre-Post Comparison on the Oral Language Assessment Scales (LAS) by Achievement Level (n = 50)

Assessment	Level	Standardized Score	n	% of Students
Baseline Year				
	1a	0-20	33	66%
	1b	21-40	5	10%
	1c	41-54	5	10%
	2	55-64	2	4%
	3	65-74	4	8%
	4	75-84	1	2%
	5	85-100	0	0%
Comparison Year				
	1a	0-20	24	48%
	1b	21-40	6	12%
	1c	41-54	9	18%
	2	55-64	5	10%
	3	65-74	3	6%
	4	75-84	3	6%
	5	85-100	0	0%

Conclusions and Discussion

Strengths. The Newcomer program is clearly helping students with limited English skills prepare to enter the mainstream classroom. The JCPS Newcomer program provides students not just with intensive language instruction, but also with a safe educational environment in which to acquire basic academic and school survival skills. The Newcomer program illustrates the following characteristics: orientation to school, community, and society; English language development; and bilingual staff specifically trained to meet the needs of newcomer students. Overall the Newcomer program is addressing its goals towards preparing students for the mainstream classroom.

Weaknesses. As indicated the comparison between baseline scores on the LAS and scores after one year in the program, students are making significant gains in their English proficiency. However, the gains are not great enough to move students from the Non-English speaking category to the Limited or Fluent categories needed to perform in the mainstream classroom. A total of 43 students were categorized as Non-English speaking during the baseline year, by January 2001 39 students were still in the Non-English speaking category. Consideration needs to be given to how to strengthen the program to not only increase scores, but to move students into the limited and fluent categories.

Recommendations for Improving the 2001-2002 Newcomer Program.

A first recommendation is to continue to collaborate with Western High School for program location. Although the school is not located in the closest vicinity of the student's homes, there is strong evidence from the faculty and program administrators that the success of this program is due largely to the setting of Western High School. Students have ample classroom space have strong support of the school principal.

Another recommendation is to provide students with more explicit information regarding the program duration. Several students did not appear to understand when they would be placed in the mainstream classroom. Attendance at the Newcomer School is limited to no more than one year. Some Newcomer students return to their home schools in less than a year. *(Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, 1991).*

In terms of the Management Information Systems (MIS) a discrepancy was confirmed. As result, it is recommended a better level of coordination between the ESL Office, the school, and MIS. The data entry for all students is important so that all ESL students are identified on the Teradata system. A final, but not least important recommendation is to create measurable objectives for the number of students to bring from the Non-English speaking categories to the Limited or Fluent categories.

Further Research

Future research could examine the academic gains by language background, especially between the largest language groups represented in the Newcomer Program. It might show that the needs are different according to different culture groups (e.g., Eastern European and Latin America cultures and educational backgrounds). Finally, a more specific analysis by subject area might reveal different levels of gains by language background.

References

Bennici, F.J. & Strang, E.W. (1995). An analysis of language minority and limited English proficient students from NELS 1988. Report to the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, U.S. Department of Education, August 1995.

Gall, M.D., Borg, W.R., & Gall, J.P. (1996). Educational Research: An Introduction (6th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.

Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V.J., & Granhm, W. F. (1989). Towards a conceptual framework for mixed method evaluation designs. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11, 255-274.

Olsen, R. W-B. (1997). Enrollment, identification, and placement of LEP students increase (again). TESOL Matters, 7(4), 6-7.

Stuffelbeam, D.L. (1971). The relevance of the CIPP evaluation model for educational accountability. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 5, 19-25.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions for Newcomer Program Participants

We are interested in learning about your experience in the Newcomer Program. Could you please tell us your general impressions of the program?

Do you think that being in this program has helped improved your English writing, comprehension and verbal abilities?

Tell us about what you have been doing in school?

Do you think you are prepared to enter the mainstream classroom next year? Tell us why or why not?

What has been the most helpful aspect of the program?

What would you recommend to improve the program?

Do you feel that you were placed in the right grade level?

Have the assemblies been helpful in familiarizing you to American culture?

How has your experience in this program benefited your parents?